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Schlesinger Urges Radical Cut in Europe

U.S. Troop-Cut Plans Called Insufficient

By R. Jeffrey Smith
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The United States should plan for a radical reduction of its forces in Western Europe as a result of East European political reforms that have all but eliminated the Warsaw Pact military threat, former defense secretary James R. Schlesinger said yesterday.

"The military balance has been radically altered," Schlesinger told the Senate Armed Services Committee. "The role for the American forces [in Europe] has now been superseded" by pressure from Moscow's allies for a swift withdrawal of Soviet troops from their territory, he said.

Schlesinger, who served as Central Intelligence Agency director and as the top defense official under Presidents Richard M. Nixon and Gerald R. Ford from 1973 to 1975, urged that U.S. troops in Europe eventually be cut from the current level of 305,000 to between 75,000 and 100,000.

The U.S. proposal on the table at East-West negotiations on conventional forces would scale these forces back to 275,000, an amount that Schlesinger said was far higher than seems militarily justified, and more than West European public sentiment will support. He also warned that setting such a high ceiling threatened to legitimize "the long-term presence of Soviet forces" in Eastern Europe.

Noting that Belgium and West Germany have announced cutbacks in their own frontline military forces, Schlesinger observed that "the time has come, more or less, for Europe to move towards the condition stated by former [West German] chancellor Helmut Schmidt: Europe should be defended primarily by French and German forces" with the United States playing a much smaller role.

Schlesinger disparaged comments by "some of our defense people" that the United States must hedge against enormous "uncertainties" in the European political scene by maintaining defense spending and European force deployments near present levels for a while.

"The outcome of these uncertainties will not lead to the reimposition of Soviet domination in Eastern Europe nor the restoration of the classic threat that has concerned us since the Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948, Schlesinger said.

"All the king's horses and all the king's men cannot put that particular Humpty-Dumpty back together again," he said.

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